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ABSTRACT

Individualized instruction is discussed as a means of making ESL instruction effective for all students. This instruction should be based on the student's past experience and present needs, information that can be gathered into a student profile. Practical suggestions for kindergarten through grade 6 include bringing the individual's home, background, ethnicity, etc., into focus in the classroom, and creating small groups based on common interest. Suggestions for grades 7 through 13 include individual research projects and games for two players. Suggestions for adults include working on legal documents, official forms, etc., according to the students' individual needs, and creating dialogues in pairs. It is emphasized that the success of these and other activities depends on the choice of certain students for specific tasks and on the number of times a particular grouping is used for each student. These decisions should be based on information in the student profile.

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INDIVIDUALIZING THE ESL PROGRAM (or Teaching in the Ways in which Students Learn)

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A Rationale

One major direction in which English as a second language teaching is moving both in Ontario and elsewhere in the world is towards greater individualizing in method of presentation and content of program.

Many of us involved in this field have been searching for years for the one, best, overall method of teaching ESL. We have explored the merits of grammar-translation, direct method, audio-lingualism, and a situational approach, but still we have not found the method which suits all second-language learners. We have also not been able to identify for all students that one basic core of English words and structures to be mastered first. The 5 year-old girl and the 55 year-old woman use language for such different purposes, that, even if some items are common to both, the situations in which those items are used by each are very different.

So, after looking at all the alternatives both as to method of presentation and course content, we are not yet satisfied that any one program is the best one for all our students. Where do we go from here? Should we simply be eclectic, taking whatever seems best from each possibility and putting it all together to produce our personal recipe for the "perfect" course?

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We think not. We would prefer to explore the notion that we owe it to our students to develop programs which will be effective on more than a hit-and-miss basis. The students, then, become our focus. Their characteristics and strategies for learning a language are what we need to know about in order that we may design programs which have a good chance of being successful. To gather the necessary information, we need to establish *Student Profiles*. We can then select from the large store available, appropriate methods, techniques, materials, and experiences to use with our students.¹

A Student Profile

General Characteristics

1. Age. Do younger people learn better than older people?
2. Sex. Generally females learn better than males in school settings, but in informal situations?
3. Previous education, kind, extent, and attitude of student towards learning in general.
4. Intelligence. Seems to account for only a small part of language learning.
5. Student's expectation of teacher and course.
6. Occupation.
7. Personality. Outgoing or shy; amount of confidence, etc.
8. Socio-economic background.
9. Length of time in Canada.
10. Style of life in Canada.

Language and Learner Characteristics

1. Mother tongue. Varies from a help to a hindrance.
2. Cultural background. Always highly important.
3. Previous language learning. Usually influences present learning.

¹ This is, of course, not the first attempt to analyse and categorise the factors involved in language learning and their implications for teaching method and program content. The authors are indebted to H. H. Stern's work in developing "a general model for second language teaching" (forthcoming), and an article by Peter Strevens in *Dedalus*, Summer, 1973, entitled "Second Language Learning".

4. Stage of learning English.
5. Home environment. How much English is used in the family and by whom?
6. Exposure to media carrying English -- Radio, TV, Cinema, print, etc.
7. Attitudes towards English, speakers of English, Canadian way of life.
8. Motivation to learn English. Is it English for a job or English to "integrate with other Canadians"?
9. Aptitude for learning languages. The notion that some people have an "ear" for language; certain aptitude measures exist, but were prepared for *English-speakers* contemplating learning a second language e.g., Modern Language Aptitude Test, by J. Carroll and S. Saxon and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery, by P. Pimsleur.

Possible Strategies

1. Preference for learning alone, in small groups, or in large groups.
2. Ear/Eye preference. Preference for learning by listening and speaking, vs. by reading and writing, vs. no preference.
3. Preference for quiet observation vs. outgoing participation in activities in class or elsewhere.
4. Use of language analysis, rules, explanation, etc.
5. Preference for "immersion" in English.
6. Use of translation.
7. Use of visuals.
8. Use of rote learning.

Information on the points in the above list can be obtained from registration forms, introductory interviews, and from on-going work in class.

What Individualizing Is and Is Not

An individualized program does not mean the end of *large group instruction*. The teacher might well begin with a presentation to a large group, and then use other of the various groupings (small-group, student/student, student along with or without a machine, student/teacher) especially for those students who do not appear to benefit from the large group experience.

Nor does individualized learning imply totally *student-directed learning*. Students will naturally tend to practise language that they can already use quite successfully and neglect other areas, unless the teacher also demands work in areas he or she sees as needing attention.

Individualizing does not mean *staying forever with the one strategy* which the student expresses as his preference on the first night of the course. The teacher should gradually help the student towards expanding the range of language-learning strategies in which he feels comfortable e.g., introducing television as a medium for language learning to a student whose previous experience of formal learning has been restricted to the printed word.

An individualized program is not simply *programed instruction* or *modularization*, though it may include both of these techniques.

An individualized approach does not mean a *reduction of the teacher's role in the classroom*, though it usually does imply a reduction of the amount of time a teacher occupies as the focus of attention for all students. Giving a student a task and sending him off, without frequently encouraging him, guiding him, and arranging opportunities for him to demonstrate to his teacher and/or others his newly-acquired skill and knowledge, may lead him to feel that he has been given busy work merely to occupy him while the teacher is involved with others.

Individualizing is making the teaching/learning situation an effective means of learning for each individual student, based on his present needs and past experiences.

Techniques for Implementing an Individualized Program

The following suggestions and points for discussion resulted from workshop sessions chaired by the authors at the May TESL Conference, and during the Ministry of Education's 1973 ESL Summer Course. Many thanks to all the ESL teachers who participated, for their contributions. An extended list of language activities which could be used in an individualized program is in preparation. If you wish to receive a copy, please write to *TESL Talk*, giving your name and address and the age-range most appropriate to your teaching interests i.e., (1) Kindergarten – Grade 6 (2) Grade 7 – 13 (3) Adults

Suggestions for K – Grade 6

1. Use parents and interpreters to find out more about the children, their family and educational background. Encourage parents to spend time with their children in school, discussing what is going on in their native language.

2. Exploit a child's strengths and weaknesses. Kinds of children who would need special programing include:

- a) a shy child who does not like to verbalise or play with other children;
- b) a child who speaks a dialect of English other than Canadian and whose teachers and peers have difficulty understanding him;
- c) a child literate in his own language but unable to read in English;
- d) a domineering child, very anxious to make his point at all times, whether asked or not.

Similarly, special programing is required for a child with a physical handicap: e.g., with a child who has little or no sight, emphasis must be placed on the senses of hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting. The teacher's facial expressions or other body language of a visual nature should be replaced by verbalization (i.e., 'I am angry at your behaviour' – instead of a warning look, or 'I am very pleased with your suggestions' – instead of a smile). Greater order would have to be maintained in the physical arrangement of the room (garbage can, scissors, cassette recorder always in the same place).

3. To establish from the very beginning the idea that the child is an individual, unique within the class, a teacher could try the following. Show the children a photograph of him/herself as a baby and ask each child to bring a similar photo; take individual polaroid shots of each other; supply some mirrors. Then either as a group or in pairs, discuss the characteristics of each child as shown in the photos, e.g., hair, eyes, smile, clothes, etc.; compare; match baby pictures to those taken recently; what does the mirror tell you that a photograph does not; make a list of all the characteristics discussed, select a symbol for each child and complete a table which shows e.g., how many children have brown eyes and whether any two children have all physical characteristics in common (any identical twins?).

4. One teacher reported that she finds a constant source of new material in the students themselves. The ethnic population of her school has changed several times over the past few years, and her resources for helping the children learn English reflect this. As an example, with the recent arrival of Korean children, she encouraged them to bring Korean books, pictures, and artifacts from home; her librarian purchased books in Korean and books in English about Korea for the library; the teacher learned and sang with the children Korean songs; they discussed fables and myths of Korean origin; the children set up their classroom as though it were a Korean school and acted out a half-hour lesson with a mother, who had been a teacher in Korea, playing the role of teacher. All this, and much more concerning Food, Games, Ceremonies, was included, not simply to look back on what had been reality for these students, but also to give the teacher a wealth of well-understood material which she could exploit as a means of developing the children's English.

5. Try to organise the physical arrangement of the classroom so that it will meet the requirements of changing groupings involved in different activities (large, small groups, pairs, single children, acting, discussing, reading, writing, making, etc.). The ideal ESL room looks something like a cross between a Junior Kindergarten and a Learning Resources Centre; or, wherever possible, use the students' own class areas to meet with them when you are not out of the school altogether.

6. A variety of activities based on different groupings might include:

a) Child working alone.

- listening to a tape on snakes to find specific information (questions also recorded on tape before and after listening)
- writing to a pen-friend in Vancouver.
- proof-reading a piece of written work.
- watching a special TV program and reporting back.
- finding a favourite recipe from home and bringing it to school for other children to try.

b) Child working with one other person.

- advanced ESL student could teach a beginner colours, parts of the body, names of animals on a zoo filmstrip, how to operate movie projector.
- older student could help younger one to learn how to skate.
- children of similar ability in language could prepare a list of questions to ask the school volley ball captain; work on a science experiment at a water table to find out which objects float.
- non-ESL student could teach ESL child how to play a game such as Krypto, Yahtzee, Animal Lotto or he/she could read the ESL student a story, tape stories for ESL students' use, act as scribe for ESL child's story or letter.
- child working with teacher could be discussing his progress and interpretation of report card; talking over his personal experiences and problems; organizing a research project; evaluating a piece of composition.
- child working with parent could be practising oral spelling, reading aloud, explaining a project, doing math problems.
- child working with librarian could be learning how to use the card catalogue or discussing books both have read and enjoyed.

c) Small groups of children working together.

i) Similar abilities and age.

- discussing plans for a field trip they will all be going on e.g., what do we need to take with us when we go camping?
- talking about a story they have all read and making a list of words to describe the main characters.

ii) Varying abilities and ages.

- putting on a play, each with his own job, a verbal child

playing the part which requires a lot of talking, a shy child being the sound man or set-maker, older child assuming the responsibilities of director.

iii) Same interest groups.

- Craft Club, where a parent from the community comes in to teach macrame, soap-carving, toy-making, candle-making.
- Debating Club, to discuss topics such as how to improve school, or a controversial current affairs issue such as how we waste our natural resources.
- Film Club, working together to shoot a movie.

d) Large groups of children working together.

- learning a song.
- following directed activities in gym or on field.
- going on a field trip.
- listening to a story, watching TV.
- class meeting to discuss common problems such as fighting in the playground, making friends.

Suggestions for Grades 7 - 13

Activities for Students Learning on their Own

- 1) Viewing assignments: film, filmstrip, slides, TV, e.g., to watch a hockey game and bring back language information or questions.
- 2) Lesson Cards on file: have other students prepare unit lessons on simple language topics (such as how to tell the time, articles or winter clothing, basic Geography terminology) which the beginning student can work through on his own and then come to the teacher or more advanced student for testing.
- 3) Individual Research Projects: these can be based on areas of student interest such as flowers, sports, pottery, or in other subject areas such as Social Studies or Science, or on field trips such as a winter camping expedition or a visit to the Planetarium.
- 4) Video-tapes of demonstrations or lessons which the student could see as often as he wished. These could be commercially prepared (OECA) or even produced within the school if the equipment is available.

- 5) Tape recordings of subject area lessons: the student could tape a Science class for example, and then relay the lesson to the language teacher or other students and discuss the difficulties arising.

Activities for Learning in Pairs (Student — student; student — teacher; student — other human resource: other teacher, someone outside school).

1. Interviews
 - writing biographies of other students (suggest working out list of question-starters with class beforehand).
 - interviews of people in different occupations.
2. Telephoning
 - simulated conversations on Bell Teletrainer Kits.
 - information gathering using real phones:-
T.T.C. information, cost of record at Sam the Record Man's.
3. Skits
 - working in pairs to produce a short dramatic sketch.
4. Games
 - involving two. These can be language games (Probe or Scrabble) or games involving language for which the list is endless: card tricks, mathematical games, etc.
5. Teams for Research Projects
 - Students in pairs can divide the labour on a project to capitalize on individual talents.

Activities for Small Groups

1. Use of tape recorders and multiple head phones. For reading.
2. Reporting back to a small group working on a project.
3. Preparing content questions based on a reading selection.
4. Skits based on some routine occurrence:
 - ordering a meal in a restaurant
 - visit to the doctor or dentist.
5. Games: Monopoly, Scrabble, card games, word games
 - Team games: charades; relays; "alibi".

6. Reading Group Competition: students decide on best answers to a series of comprehension questions and then debate their answer choices with the other group(s).
7. Subject Work Difficulties: can be solved by having other students explain to those having difficulty.
8. Set up maps of local area showing places of interest, topography, vegetation, density of population, etc.
9. Organise a party or charity drive. (This can be an excellent source of language practice if the teacher disciplines him/herself to keep out of the planning except when consulted.
10. Cooperative stamp collection which could then be shown to other non-ESL groups and finally donated to the Library.
11. Newspaper given to a group for clipping and discussing of what its members think is important.
12. Preparing a grocery shopping list for:
 - a) a special dinner
 - b) a weekend
 - c) a camping trip
 - d) favourite foods
 - e) food for a pet dog, cat, bird, snake, and cheetah.
13. Listen to a tape-recording of a news item and dramatize it, e.g., a fire. Organise a written news report on the same topic.

General Comments

1. As in the K — Grade 6 section, it is important that the physical set-up of the classroom be flexible enough to accommodate these various groupings.
2. Many students in this age-range have acquired some familiarity with written English in their native countries; if so, it is advisable to work from what the students know, gradually introducing work in oral English, rather than demanding a strictly oral approach from the outset.

Suggestions for Adults

The Student on his Own

Even as a beginner, he can be taught to observe and note down for later discussion, signs and simple messages visible in his environment e.g., in the school, on the subway, in stores and businesses, at the library.

At all levels, the students can use a language laboratory or individual tape recorder, providing that good tapes are available for practice. Some of the most effective tapes are those used in conjunction with visuals, such as overhead projectuals, slides or filmstrips.

Out of class practice situations can be set up for students e.g., finding out when the Science Centre is open, how much the entrance charge is, how to reach there from the student's home by T.T.C.

A Group of students with a teacher

1. Discuss the clothes one would wear in various situations e.g., a party, the beach, etc. As a follow up, create dialogues appropriate to these situations.
2. Introduce the language of measurement (height, weight, distance, speed, etc.) and have groups measure items in both metric and imperial systems.
3. Discuss the physical lay-out of their houses; set up diagrams, including residents and neighbours. Design a co-operative "ideal-home". How to show a prospective buyer around a house — dialogue.
4. Divide two classes, one teacher taking all the women and one all the men for an "Interest Hour" on e.g., how to describe a child's illness to a doctor vs. how to describe an automobile's illness to a garage mechanic.
5. Cooperative end to a story beginning — 'If Joe hadn't locked himself out of the house' . . . or any other phrase the teacher cares to create.

6. Ask students to draw or collect pictures of winter activities and use as discussion stimulators. Compare different leisure activities and different attitudes towards a Canadian winter.
7. A small group might need a practice session with the teacher on a specialised vocabulary, use of past tense, prepositions, position of adjectives in sentences, how to make particular sounds in English, etc.

Student and Teacher Alone

A teacher's responsiveness to an individual and pressing need such as the vocabulary to discuss and read about house construction in English or help in how to extract essential meaning from a legal document, or fill out an official form, is often the most effective way of reaching a student. Any such request can be exploited as a valuable language lesson. Homework assignments, designed to meet individual needs and corrected by the teacher, are another source of personal interaction which, though time-consuming, can reap great dividends.

Student with another Student (or group)

1. Creating dialogues in pairs e.g., making appointments to visit doctor's, dentist's, hairdresser's, for job interviews, to meet someone for lunch. Dialogue practised together, then in front of teacher for possible modification, then shared with the rest of the group.
2. Problem-solving activity: each pair of students receives a small piece of paper on which have been stencilled possible questions for discussion e.g. If you wanted to send a gift to your native country, what would it be and why? If you were going camping, what would you take with you? If you had to choose a new place to live in your town, where would it be and why? Each pair chooses the question they prefer to discuss. One person in each pair takes notes, then together they decide what they will report back to the larger group. Report is made orally and questions fielded. Then the teacher or advanced student collects written notes, edits them, puts them on stencil, and hands final collective version to all members of the group for reference.

3. Discussion assignments: pairs asked to find out e.g., what they have in common with their partners, what kind of people each likes, a brief biography to introduce partner to larger group.
4. Simple language items which a slightly more advanced student can teach a beginner include: numbers, days of week, months of year, parts of body, clothes, how to tell the time, titles of people who provide neighbourhood services, how to ask for something in a drug store, how to read a menu, names of familiar objects, foods, colours, common courtesy expressions.

Conclusion

Most of the activities outlined above have been organised in terms of the different groupings in which they work best. It must be stressed, however, that which activities a teacher selects for each student, which students are asked to operate in these various groupings and how often a particular grouping is used for each student, are crucial decisions for the teacher to make. These decisions should reflect the information gathered in the Student Profile, and will, hopefully, make the hours each student spends in learning English maximally effective.